

# Impact of Market Orientation on the Performance of Private Universities in Pakistan

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** *The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of market orientation on the performance of private universities in Pakistan. The effects of market orientation are visualized on different performance measures which were developed for universities specifically.*

**Design/methodology/approach:** *The data in this study was collected through survey strategy from 300 faculty members of 15 randomly selected private universities of Pakistan. The survey was performed by using questionnaire stating the measures of market orientation and performance. The reliability and validity of scale were assessed. The regression analysis was performed to test the hypothesis.*

**Findings:** *The findings of this study confirm the relationship of market orientation with performance measures. The market orientation has positive and significant relationship with student retention, student growth, market share, quality of teaching & services, research performance and overall performance.*

**Research Limitations:** *The data was collected from only one country Pakistan. Furthermore, this study is cross-sectional as performance measure may be longitudinal process.*

**Originality/value:** *The results of this study point out the importance of market orientation in private universities. The universities with high level of market orientation will have positive performance outcomes in terms of higher level of student retention, enrolment growth and rise in market share and enhancement in overall performance.*

**Key Words:** Market Orientation, Performance, Higher Education Institution (HEI), Private University, Pakistan.

## **Introduction**

The strategic marketing practices are earning attention of managers involved in services business (Lovelock, 1983). In service sector Canterbury (2000) argues that marketing of higher education is challenge because of some markets and characteristics of higher education are different from other markets of goods or services. However, the competition for students, faculty and funds among Higher Education Institutions has increased the importance of marketing in education industry (Bennet and Ali-Choudhury, 2009).

The market orientation has been a tremendous strategic marketing concept applying to the tertiary sector. The market orientation always improves the business performance (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Dawes, 2000; Guo, 2002; Maydeu-Olivares and Lado, 2003; Kaynak and Kara, 2004; Singh, 2009). As mentioned earlier the market orientation in higher education is gaining ground. But mostly public universities has been the part of sample regarding market orientation and performance relationship since many decades. The market orientation application in private universities has been obscured in the literature. As public

and private universities have some differences, due to which it is not fair enough to generalize the results of public universities to private universities.

There are major structural, market and funds source differences between public and private universities. Floyd (2007) argued that enterprenurial behavior in for-profit sector of higher education is very visible and for profit universities are more vulnerable towards the modern economic and managerial theories of firms and markets as compared to public sector not-for-profit universities. Cabrito (2004) views that due to high grades requirements and intense competition for admission in public universities many students could not get admission in public universities and eventually they enrolled themselves in private universities.

According to Breneman et al, (2006) in public universities the values and objectives could not go with each other as compared to private universities. They have also claimed that private and public universities have their own niche market segments which is mixed quite often. It has been reported that private university business schools show great attention towards market orientation as compared to public university business schools (Webster et al, 2005). Ferreria and Hill (2007) differentiate private universities from their counterparts by arguing that enrolment growth of students and their retention are last resorts for the survival of private universities (Shah et al., 2013). Therefore, the role of market orientation in private universities performance should be investigated independently. This is the main objective of this study. However, there are few studies comprehending the relationship of market orientation and private universities performance (Zebal and Goodwin, 2012).

The performance measures used in different studies are varying. In some studies the financial or economic performance of firms (Maydeu-Olivares and Lado, 2003; Caurana et al, 1998), and non-economic performance is measured. The traditional performance measures for businesses were not seen as adequate for educational Institutions. Although, the performance measures development for universities has got attraction of many researchers. Many performance measures are developed by (Chen et al, 2009; Guthrie and Neumann, 2007).

Among these performance indicators some indicators are common and different as well. The quality of teaching and service, research results, faculty resources and student retention are common performance measures proposed by above stated studies. But there are very few studies addressing the students retention and research performance relationship with market orientation in higher education institutions. This study intends to investigate the relationship of market orientation with research performance and student retention in private universities of Pakistan. However, in this study the performance measures used in recent studies will also be addressed specifically in case of Pakistan.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Market Orientation***

There has been extensive literature contribution on market orientation in last three decades. The market orientation is key element of marketing literature, which has paramount importance for creation of superior performance. According to Taghian (2010), marketing planning is a method which enables marketers to implement market orientation strategy. Market orientation is a strategy that entails a process of continuous information gathering. This information helps management to respond market dynamics and turbulence effectively (Taghian, 2010).

Kohli and Jaworski (1990) had traced back this perspective of market orientation. They operationalized the market orientation definition in three components; *Intelligence*

**generation, dissemination and responsiveness.** The intelligence generation comprises the firm's ability to collect information about its customers, competitors, technology and other environmental factors. The second component indicates the degree of willingness of a firm to disperse market information to all other departments. The responsiveness of firm comprises the strategy formulation on the basis of information gathered and disseminated. They argued that these three components provide organisations a unified focus that eventually leads to superior performance. Narver and Slater (1990) have viewed that only organizational culture creates the necessary three behavioral components of market orientation (customer orientation, competitor orientation and interfunctional coordination) and two decision criteria (long term focus, profit objective).

The market orientation through these behaviors creates superior value for any type of business (Narver and Slater, 1990). In this cultural perspective, Homburg and Pflesser (2000) gain further insights by proving that norms and values are not enough to promote market oriented behaviors. Shapiro (1988) defined market orientation as an organizational decision making that entirely based upon information of customers' preferences. And strategy implantation too, is made possible by market orientation (Homburg et al, 2004).

Ruekert (1992) developed the strategic perspective of market orientation. Whenever, customer is supposed to be the focus of marketing planning of an organization, then it is logically important to make customers the integral part of strategic planning. The firm's strategy should be customer focused and all the plans and actions must embrace the true needs of present and potential customers (Ruekert, 1992).

There has been many studies embracing different dimensions of market orientation. Yet, in the literature, there is broad consensus on the four elements of market orientation. These four elements are as follows:

- 1) Customer orientation
- 2) Information gathering
- 3) Inter-functional coordination
- 4) Responsiveness to customers

There is also broad agreement on the implications of these elements of market orientation. These are the key elements for any type of organization to create value for all of its stakeholders.

### ***Customer orientation***

This dimension has received a great attention of researchers. It is considered as the most primary factor that drives firms towards customer satisfaction. Because if a firm wants to qualify for market orientation then it must understand its prospects, whether customers would buy its products or not. According to Narver and Slater (1990) target market should be well thought of by company. The clear understandings of potential customers leads organizations all the way. The marketers must not be complacent regarding identification of customers needs (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Beyond the customers, the members of value delivery network must also be understood, because they are also supposed to be influencing the customers' purchasing intentions (Shapiro, 1988). The customer orientation is about listening customers and regularly measuring their satisfaction (Gray et al., 1998). Similarly, Tang (2014) claims that certainty of customer needs help organizations to balance its contradictory capabilities such that they can be used for finding best solutions of customers problems.

### ***Information gathering***

The market information gathering takes place through formal and informal sources. The regular customer survey, meetings and conversations with customers and suppliers, analysis

of sales data and formal market research process are the options available to company for generating market information. While generating market information the marketers must not over look the socio-economic, political and environmental forces that are most likely to influence customers purchasing intentions, although it is not sole responsibility of marketing department (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). A good understanding of competitors enables top management to divert firm's resources to the market opportunities (Shapiro, 1988). The competitor's understanding unveils the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for a firm and visualises the firm's willingness to understand its potential and current competitors (Deng and Dart, 1994).

### ***Inter-functional coordination***

According to Shapiro (1988) the information gathered about customers and competitors is useless until it is not being accessed by all the functions of organizations. If a company want to be customer driven then it must develop the cross functional teams to create value for customers. There should be a sophisticated communication system in an organization, so that the valuable information can be communicated to all the functional units of organization (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Ruekert (1992) argued that market orientation must be examined in all units of organization instead of considering market orientation a job of a whole organization as a unit. That is why an organization must evaluate that to what extent all the departments are involved in making strategies for superior value creation for customers (Gray et al, 1998). The different departments of organizations should be receptive regarding the dissemination of market information, which is valuable for creation of superior value for customers (Deng and Dart, 1994).

### ***Responsiveness to customers***

After collecting and dissemination of information the firms must take actions to take benefits from information gathered. In this regard, the firms must select target market and then decide the value proposition for customers. Additionally, the production, packaging and promotion strategies should also be developed in responding market needs (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). According to Varela and Rio (2003) to develop market oriented behavior organizations should be very quick in generating and sharing information. The firm's ability to instantly respond customers' changing needs is referred as firm's responsiveness (Gray et al, 1998). So, the availability of information enable an organization to take early steps to retain its competitive advantage (Caurana et al, 1998). The customer oriented plans and strategies are developed and execution of these strategies is the responsiveness of firms towards customers needs (Ruekert, 1992).

### ***Market orientation and performance relationship***

Market orientation and business performance relationship has received considerable attention of many researchers since 1990s. The outcomes of market orientation has been explored in manufacturing and service sectors. Narver and Slater (1990) first time indicated that market orientation is a significant predictor of business profitability. The market orientation provides a conducive environment to organizations to develop and use knowledge for better performance (Slater and Narver, 1995). The role of market orientation in business performance has been identified in different socio-economic environments (Zebal and Quazi, 2011). It has been confirmed that concept of market orientation and performance relationship has universality (Kaynak and Kara, 2004; Hammond et al, 2006).

The consistency of the results about relationship of market orientation and performance was also supported by Snoj et al, (2007) in transitional economy. Green et al,

(2005) believed that market orientation always improves the financial and marketing performance of any business regardless of organizational structure. According to Santos-Vijande et al, (2005) a learning organization reinforces the market orientation that ultimately contribute to economic and non- economic performance of an organization. This relationship has been validated in many type of business (Liao et al, 2011). The market orientation have positive relation with financial performance (Return on Investment, Return on sales, sales growth and market share) and marketing performance (customers retention, customers satisfaction and trust) of business (Sin et al, 2005).

### **Aims and Objectives**

The aims and objectives of the study are following:

- To investigate the causal relationship between market orientation in private universities and performance outcomes.
- To find out the relationship of market orientation and different performance measures.
- To examine the relationship of market orientation and student growth rate in private universities.
- To investigate the relationship of market orientation and market share of private universities.
- To investigate the relationship of market orientation and quality of teaching and services in private universities.
- To investigate the relationship of market orientation and retention of students in private universities.
- To investigate the relationship of market orientation and research performance of private universities.
- To investigate the relationship of market orientation and overall performance of private universities.

### **Methodology**

The quantitative methodology was used in this study. The data was collected from 15 out of 59 private universities in Pakistan. These universities are recognized by Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. The 15 private universities were randomly selected based in Lahore, Gujranwala and Islamabad cities of Pakistan. The data were collected through personally administered and structured questionnaire. The faculty members were key respondents to respond these questionnaires. The 300 faculty members approaches were both from business administration department and non-business administration department. The number of faculty members from business administration department was 171 and 129 members were from non-business administration department.

### **Measures**

To measure market orientation, 24 items are included in the instrument. These items belong to four dimensions of market orientation. The customer (student) orientation measure was formally developed by (Narver and Slater, 1990; Deng and Dart, 1994). Then this measure was further refined by Gray et al, (1998) and considered as a more pragmatic and valid measure for customer orientation. This measure consists on 4 items. The rest of dimensions information gathering, information dissemination and inter-functional coordination were measured by adopting 20-items scale from MARKOR scale developed by Kohli et al, (1993).

These 24-items for market orientation are measured on five-point likert scale where; 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree. Finally, as this study is based in tertiary sector higher education, so certain words used in market orientation were replaced by some words relevant to higher education. The changes made were; department for business unit; courses for products, tertiary education environment for industry, students for customers and academic staff for departments (Zebal and Goodwin, 2012).

The six performance indicators were used in this study to measure performance of private universities. Of these six measures overall performance and quality of teaching and services were adopted from (Bhuian, 1992). The market share was used by Collins (1990) and students growth was used by (Douglas and Craig, 1983). The students retention was used by (Niculescu et al, 2013; Zangouinezhad and Moshabaki, 2011; Chen et al, 2009)) and research performance measure was adopted from (Valadkhani and Worthington, 2006; Auranen and Nieminen, 2010; Zangouinezhad and Moshabaki, 2011; Chen et al, 2009).

Like scale items of market orientation these measures are also converted on the five-point scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Due to wider acceptance of these measures in market orientation literature these measures are also used in this study.

## **Results**

### ***Reliability and Validity***

The internal consistency of market orientation scale of measurement was assessed by calculating Cronbach alpha coefficients for four dimensions of market orientation individually and for overall market orientation too. The Table 1 shows the Cronbach alpha coefficients for each individual are ranged from .723 to .909, which confirms the reliability of scale (Nunnally, 1988; Churchill, 1995).

The discriminant validity of scale was assessed by measuring the correlation coefficients against the Cronbach alpha. It can be seen from Table 1 & 2 the values of correlation coefficients are below the values of Cronbach alpha which resonate the discriminant validity of the scale (Gaski, 1986).

### ***Correlation Analysis***

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients (PMCC) are used to measure the strength of relationships between these variables as they are contained numerical data.

The correlation between the antecedents and consequences were found consistent with the proposed relationships with each other. The probability of correlation coefficients is also calculated as in case of very low probability (less than .05) it indicates that relationship is statistically significant and in case of greater probability (greater than .05) it shows the relationship is statistically not significant.

### ***Difference between business and non-business respondents***

As the market orientation and performance relationship in case of private universities is reported. The data was collected from both categories of departments either from business administration department or non-business administration department. So it is also intended that the response towards market orientation of respondents from business studies background and non-business studies background must be compared. To fulfill this purpose independent sample t-tests were conducted which investigated that there is difference between mean which resonate that there is different interpretation of market orientation among business and non-business cases.

However, it is evident from the table that t-tests for both type of variables (business and non-business) are not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ). It can be concluded that in Pakistani Private universities, due to same culture and structure within a university all the faculty members have similar values regardless of department to which they belong. These outcomes are consistent with (Caurana et al, 1998; Zebal and Goodwin, 2012).

### **Structural Models**

The Structure Equation Modeling is used to assess the relationship between market orientation and university performance. The structural model testing relationship between market orientation and performance measures showed adequate fit, with  $X^2(6) = 24.740$ , CFI = .982, NFI = .978, TLI = .926, AGFI = .874, and RMESA = .115. The model with path coefficients is given below:

#### ***Regression Analysis:***

The regression analysis is also performed to check the intensity of relationship between market orientation (Independent variable) and performance measures (dependent variables). As shown in Table the values of adjusted R square for market orientation and each performance measure individual. The value of adjusted R square for market orientation and student retention rate (P1) is .311, which indicates that 31.1 percent variation in student retention rate is explained by market orientation.

The 44.7 percent variation in student enrolment growth (P2), 41 percent variation in market share (P3), 33.4 percent variation in quality of teaching & services (P4), 45.6 percent variation in research performance (P5) and 36.9 percent variation in overall performance (P6) are explained by market orientation. These values imply the association of market orientation with different performance measures. Among these performance measures the research performance (P5) is more influenced by market orientation because the value of adjusted square for research performance is greater than all other measures as shown in Table. Furthermore, the standardized regression coefficients (Beta coefficients) are also calculated and shown in Table.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to identify that whether there is some space for marketing activities in tertiary sector of higher education in Pakistan or not. After finding the association between market orientation and performance measures it is evident that application of market orientation can generate some positive performance outcomes such as higher student retention, remarkable growth in student enrolments, improvement in market share, improved quality of teaching and services, improved research performance and betterment in overall performance too. The relationship of market orientation with performance of higher educational institutions has been consistent in many studies (Caurana et al, 1998; Flavian and Lozano, 2006; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2010; Zebal and Goodwin, 2012).

When the universities become student oriented they need to develop strategies that can bring satisfaction for students regarding their educational accomplishments. These strategies must be formulated according to students needs and desires so that they can be effective to achieve institutional goals. As in this study the relationship is found between market orientation student retention, student growth and market share, so it can be stated that if the courses offered, service quality, facilities and environment are according to students needs at university than it can claim to be a market oriented. This value offering gives a market oriented university a privilege of students satisfaction which give reason to students

to stay loyal with the universities. This will consequently help universities to achieve higher level of student retention. When the students experience their strong orientation in a university than they provide dual benefits to the universities. First, the satisfaction of students predict their retention level in a particular university. Second, the satisfied students have positive beliefs about a particular institution and they like to share their positive experiences and beliefs with others. This sharing of positive experiences and beliefs play an important role in shaping positive purchase intentions of prospects and potential customers (students). Hence, universities will experience eminent growth in student enrolments and increase in market share which is good not only for financial performance but also for competitive positioning (Zebal and Goodwin, 2012; Niculescu et al, 2013). The higher level of student retention, student enrolment growth and increase in market share provide universities to endorse their bargaining power towards suppliers and towards customers as well. These outcomes enable universities to develop their rivalry in industry. This all could be possible if universities are successful in adopting market orientation.

The relationship between market orientation and quality of teaching and services is also observed in this study. This outcome is crucial for universities because this is a major concern for any type of educational institutions. The student oriented universities gather information from students regarding the service quality offered by universities. The periodical review of courses and changing of courses according to changing environment enable universities to permeate their plans regarding courses and modern teaching methods towards faculty members. This could help faculty members to understand students needs in real sense and they can deliver knowledge according to their expectations.

Moreover, the feedback from students about teaching quality and services help to improve quality of teaching. This maturity of promises done by universities develop students trust on their particular education institution and positive beliefs will be further strengthened. There is need of exploring factors that can be useful for penetrating market orientation in teaching staff because this will improve quality of teaching and services. This improvement in quality of teaching could help in demands of society and promises to society not to compromise on quality of education (Flavian and Lozano, 2006).

Another important causal relationship confirmed in this study is between market orientation and research performance of universities. The research performance of private universities in terms of research funding, publications and number of research students. It has been evident that universities ranking is an important process in tertiary sector at global level. The ranking enable universities to capture market share in a particular market from their competitors. In the ranking criteria the research output is an integral element. So, universities have to make their orientation in such a way that they can get high score in ranking which will improve their financial position and non-financial position.

The research performance is also an important indicator in admission criteria of research students. They compare different universities on the basis of their ranking and research output to get admission. So, if a university is market oriented than it can generate information about students admission criteria (students needs), competitors value offering and changing environment which focus upon research and development. This information can urge upon the efforts for improvement in research performance to stay in competition. When inter-functional coordination is strong in a university then department may focus on resources required for research during departmental meetings. This will create the competition between departments and improve the research productivity of university as a whole. The increasing number of research students at global level has made it necessary for universities to camouflage themselves in such a way that they can be most appealing to research scholars.



According to (Flavian and Lozano, 2006; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2010), the faculty members should use internal marketing to improve the performance of their institution. They can do this through their own task and performances. These tasks and performances are related to participation in conferences, doing publications and supervising doctoral thesis. By taking part in these activities the faculty members can promote a favourable image of their institution among the students and potential students. Eventually, this internal market orientation will raise the student retention level, enrolment growth of students, market share and research performance as well. Perhaps, that is why in this study the research performance measure is correlated with other performance measures. Last causal relationship in this study is between market orientation and overall performance. The market orientation like other performance measures also have positive influence on overall performance. It is to be expected that when positive change occurs in other performance measures due to market orientation than it is quite obvious that overall performance will also improve (Caurana et al, 1998).

The relationship between market orientation and performance has been discussed. But on the other side Woller (2002) warned that implementing market orientation is not an easy job. Every organization has not intentions to adopt market orientation. Because it is costly for short-term cashflows and some times complacent management may not want to mould their strategies according to changing needs of customers. This marketing myopia may cause sufferings for an organization. The firms that focus on product not on market may become the history. To some extent Naumann and Shannon (1992) also have some support for above given argument. They argue that market orientation is a long evolutionary process that may not be able to produce short term positive results but it will certainly develop a sustainable competitive advantage of the firm. These findings can be generalized in case of private universities if universities do not prevail market oriented behavior than might be possible they can survive in good economic condition but in case of global financial crisis such type of universities will loose their competitive space.

### **Conclusion:**

In the light of results and discussion it can be concluded that market orientation increases the profitability of a firm (Narver and Slater, 1990). In this study the relationship of market orientation and performance is vindicated once more time. After finding relationship of market orientation with different performance measures it can be concluded that market orientation is not only relevant for business but it is also relevant for universities. The customer orientation can improve the marketing performance of a service firm by developing service capabilities (Tang, 2014). But this operationalization of customer orientation may not compatible with educational institution because of their different current industry environment.

The customer orientation in university setting should not be restricted towards gathering information about competitors and customers in the current environment but it also anticipate the changing trends in regulations or study environment. Therefore, it is useful for universities to adopt strategic orientation and gather information about customers and competitors to gain deep insights (Zebal and Goodwin, 2012). The universities have two type of functions one for academic purpose and other for administration purpose. The coordination between both type of functions is necessary to create value for students. In case of universities the ample resources must be devoted to responsiveness so that they can meet market requirements and improve their overall performance.

The managers in higher education institutions must make concrete efforts to promote market oriented culture in their institutions. The student orientation, information collection

about changing needs and preferences of students, inter-departmental coordination and immediate responsiveness enable universities to improve their profitability through growth in enrolment, rise in market share and enhancement in overall performance. The managers should ensure the trickle downing of market orientation from top level management to the all staff members including teaching and administration. By doing this the value will be created for students through integrated efforts. This value offering will consist upon better teaching quality and better facilities offered to students.

This study also offered some potential opportunities for future research. First of all it should be identified that how different levels of market orientation effect performance outcomes? How can organization improve their level of market orientation? Second, as in this study it has been discussed that performance measures for educational institutions are different than other business sectors. So, there should be future research on the impact of market orientation on these particular measures of performance of universities.

In the previous studies it has been reported that top management emphasis is crucial for market orientation. Based on these views data has been collected from top management (Hammond et al, 2006). In contrast, in this study the data is collected from the faculty members, there is some probability that faculty members may not be prudent key informers regarding market orientation. Second, the performance measure has been a longitudinal process but in this study is cross-sectional and performance has been measured only once. The longitudinal process may have different results. The last limitations to this research is the sample size which is 15 private universities out of 59 private universities in a single country of Pakistan. As these randomly selected universities may not be the representative of research population.

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